

MANIFESTO FOR SCHOOL INNOVATION AND QUALITY

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This manifesto presents the vision of the Q4I project partners on how quality assurance and improvement of education in European schools should be addressed through an innovation-oriented approach. The Q4I consortium believes that educational innovation can improve the quality management approach in schools and at the same time quality assurance can ground learning innovation in the structural/systemic schools improvement processes and daily life.

The manifesto puts forward four key ideas.

1. Innovation and Quality should work together. Q4I proposes to combine quality management with innovation in a way that respects and builds on the specificity of school education. Quality planning (criteria, benchmarks etc.) should be based on objectives negotiated between individual schools and their stakeholders. Quality objectives and innovation objectives should be defined contextually – together. Quality development should be “light”: it should be a pleasant activity, not burdened by procedural constraints and should be an interactive process, activating the team’s spirit to work towards asking and receiving feedback to implement the desired change. Quality approaches should be close to daily practices in schools. Identifying the “quality gaps” by the actors and main stakeholders is the starting point of ownership of quality development.

2. The role of ICT. Several independent researches show that ICT-supported education increases the motivation among learners and ultimately brings to better learning results. Effective embedding of ICT in the curriculum enables learners to focus on higher learning goals like apply, analyse, evaluate and publish. Nevertheless, the recognised potential of ICT to support innovation and improve education is not a reality in most European countries. In reality, education in Europe does not fully benefit from having fully embedded the potential of ICT to improve the efficiency, accessibility and equity of learning systems. ICT should play an important facilitating role, to make innovation happen more quickly and to help connecting school education with the activities of students outside the school, bridging formal and informal learning. ICT should also be used to support the quality assurance processes.

3. Policy innovation for European schools A new “innovation oriented” wave of policy making linking education, employability and innovation is required. If incorporated in innovation strategies and better positioned within the overall lifelong learning field, this would contribute to accelerating and consolidating the transformation of school environments. A new awareness in policy environments exists, especially at the EU level (as the Rethinking Education communication proves). The challenge is how to implement these policy objectives into practice, for example through large and small pilots, rewarding mechanisms and mobility of staff and students. Q4I encourages bottom-up innovation and school autonomy within a given framework of objectives defined at policy level.

4. The cornerstone of certification. Innovative schools should have the possibility to be recognised and rewarded for their action. A certification model needs to apply which stimulates benchmarking among innovators and raise the overall quality of the implementation of education. Community recognition and continuous improvement are key for a sustainable certification scheme. The certification scheme should be a “light one”, focusing on non-prescriptive elements. It should certify those practices that are improving quality by rewarding original approaches and “new ways of doing the usual things”.